

Transactions

JUNE/JULY 2004

TRANSPORTATION NEWS
FOR THE NINE-COUNTY
SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



DAVID MCGLYNN

Special Offer

Use FasTrak™ and Roll the Toll Back — to \$2!

Starting July 1, 2004, tolls on the region's seven Caltrans bridges are rising to \$3 for cars and other two-axle vehicles. Sign up today to pay your tolls electronically with FasTrak™, and we'll roll the price back to \$2* for the next four months. What are you waiting for? Save money. Save time. Simplify your drive.

Why use FasTrak™?

FasTrak™ allows you to take advantage of the growing number of dedicated FasTrak™ lanes on Bay Area bridges and makes your trip faster, cheaper and easier. Your toll is automatically collected as you drive nonstop through the toll lanes.

How does it work?

After you sign up, we'll mail you a small electronic transponder (like the one shown to the right) — free of charge. It's easily installed on the windshield inside your car. Each time you travel through the toll plaza, an overhead antenna reads your transponder, and FasTrak™ automatically deducts the appropriate discounted toll from your prepaid account.

For additional convenience, you can authorize FasTrak™ to automatically replenish your prepaid account by charging your credit card when the balance gets low. You'll never have to worry about carrying cash again.

How do I start?

Go to <www.511.org> to fill out your online application and get more information on FasTrak™, or order an application from the FasTrak™ Service Center by calling 888.725.TRAK (8725).

* The promotional FasTrak™ \$1 toll discount is valid for two-axle vehicles from July 1, 2004, to October 31, 2004, on the Caltrans bridges: Antioch, Benicia-Martinez, Carquinez, Dumbarton, Richmond-San Rafael, San Francisco-Oakland Bay and San Mateo-Hayward. The Golden Gate Bridge already offers a \$1 discount for cars with FasTrak™.

Now There Are More Reasons Than Ever to Pay Tolls Electronically

FASTRAK™ USERS TO ENJOY TEMPORARY REPRIEVE FROM \$1 TOLL HIKE

Savvy bridge travelers know that having a FasTrak™ transponder attached to their windshields saves time at the toll plaza, allowing them to zip across the bay and Carquinez Strait without having to stop and pay the toll. Starting this summer, transbay commuters' odds of avoiding toll plaza backups will be boosted still further by the phased addition of more FasTrak™-only lanes on five of the region's seven Caltrans bridges. In addition to saving time, motorists who use FasTrak™ will save money as well, with a temporary reprieve from the \$1 toll increase that was approved by the region's voters in March as part of Regional Measure 2.

If the added lanes and toll discount are not enough to get procrastinators to sign up for a FasTrak™ account, there is yet another incentive for getting a transponder now — a recently launched Web page at MTC's traveler information site, located at <www.511.org>, allows drivers to conveniently apply for FasTrak™ online.

Auto tolls on the region's seven Caltrans bridges are rising to \$3 this summer. The MTC-run Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) voted in April to give cars and other two-axle vehicles equipped with FasTrak™ transponders a \$1 discount, starting on the day the toll increase goes into effect on the Caltrans bridges — July 1, 2004 — and ending four months later on October 31, 2004.

"We wanted to thank those Bay Area drivers who already have FasTrak™ accounts by offering a discount, and to encourage others to sign up," said Rod McMillan, MTC's manager of Bridge and Highway Operations. In its role as BATA, MTC will administer the revenues from the toll increase and oversee the package of traffic-relief projects the increase will fund. The proposed toll discount will be temporary because a longer discount period would have a greater impact on the amount of toll revenues col-

lected, which could affect the delivery of the traffic-relief projects promised to voters.

BATA also voted to dedicate more lanes for FasTrak™ users on five of the state-owned bridges. Motorists will see a second FasTrak™-only lane on both the Dumbarton and San Mateo-Hayward bridges in July, and on the Benicia-Martinez and Richmond-San Rafael bridges in August. Three more FasTrak™-only lanes will open on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in September, bringing the total for that bridge to five.

The new Web page makes it possible not only for users of the Caltrans bridges to apply online for a FasTrak™ account, but also for motorists who primarily or exclusively use the Golden Gate Bridge, which is operated by the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD).

A regional FasTrak™ customer service center is set to open by June 2005; it will merge the customer service center in Concord previously operated by Caltrans (now under BATA administration) with that of the GGBHTD, which currently runs its own center in

Mill Valley. "The merger is expected to save money for all of the involved agencies, while providing customers with a seamless toll payment process," said McMillan.

A FasTrak™-only lane can handle almost three times as many vehicles per hour as a lane in which tolls are collected manually. While all lanes on all eight bridges in the region are equipped with the FasTrak™ system, only 30 percent of motorists crossing the seven Caltrans bridges (in the toll direction) during weekday peak periods now use FasTrak™. By comparison, about 70 percent of the motorists commuting southbound on the Golden Gate Bridge during the morning peak period use FasTrak™.

The robust stats for the Golden Gate Bridge can be attributed in part to a \$1 discount (off a \$5 auto toll) for FasTrak™ users, and in part to the Bridge District's practice of setting aside fully four of the 10 operational toll booths for drivers paying electronically. "We've seen the virtual elimination of the morning back-ups at the toll plaza," said Mary Currie, public affairs director for GGBHTD.

— Réka Goode

Calendar

Unless indicated otherwise, all meetings take place at: Metropolitan Transportation Commission Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter Lawrence D. Dahms Auditorium 101 Eighth Street, Oakland (At the Lake Merritt BART station)

TUESDAY

JULY 13, 2004

10 am
Partnership Board*

3:30 pm
Minority Citizens Advisory Committee

WEDNESDAY

JULY 14, 2004

9:30 am
Administration Committee*

9:45 am
Bay Area Toll Authority
Oversight Committee*

10 am
Programming and Allocations Committee*

12:30 pm
MTC Advisory Council

MONDAY

JULY 19, 2004

1:30 pm
Partnership Technical Advisory
Committee

FRIDAY

JULY 23, 2004

9:30 am
Regional Airport Planning
Committee

MONDAY

JULY 26, 2004

2 pm
TransLink® Management Group
SamTrans, 4th Floor Conference Room
1250 San Carlos Avenue, San Carlos

WEDNESDAY

JULY 28, 2004

10 am
Bay Area Toll Authority*

10:15 am
Metropolitan Transportation Commission*

* Note: Dates, times and locations of MTC meetings may change. Please confirm by calling 510.464.7787. Agendas, updated meeting schedules and packets for MTC standing committees are posted on MTC's Web site: <www.mtc.ca.gov>.

Announcement

Call for "TLC" Projects

MTC is pleased to issue a "call for projects" for the Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) Capital and Planning Program, which supports community-based transportation projects that bring new vibrancy to downtown areas, commercial cores, neighborhoods and transit corridors. The grants put smart growth concepts into action, fostering compact, mixed-use, transit-friendly developments. The deadline is 5 pm on July 16, 2004. Application materials can be accessed through MTC's Web site: <www.mtc.ca.gov/projects/livable_communities/tlc_grants.htm>.

Workshop

Mark your calendar for the 5th Annual

Marin County
Independence Forum

FRIDAY

JULY 23, 2004

10 am to 4 pm
Falkirk Mansion, 1408 Mission Street
San Rafael

Celebrating 14 years of the Americans With Disabilities Act, this daylong forum will feature speakers on a range of hot topics as well as exhibit booths and entertainment. The fee (which includes lunch) is \$30 for agency representatives and \$15 for individuals (free for attendants or those unable to pay). Sponsored by Disability Rights Enforcement, Education, Services and the Marin County Committee on Disability. Registration materials can be found at <www.station504.com>, or contact Craig Yates at 415.472.4846 or <CTY44@aol.com>.

Facts & Figures Usage of FasTrak™ on Caltrans Toll Bridges in the Bay Area — 2003

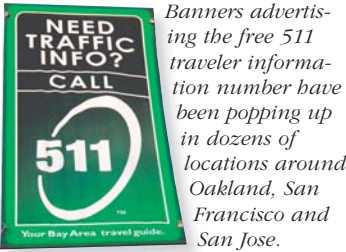
Bridge	All Traffic* (Average Daily)	FasTrak™ Traffic* (Average Daily)	FasTrak™ Percentage (Average Daily)	FasTrak™ Percentage (Peak Period)
Antioch	6,720	1,245	18.5%	20.2%
Benicia-Martinez	51,196	13,576	26.5%	30.0%
Carquinez	61,586	14,241	23.1%	28.2%
Dumbarton	34,910	9,040	25.9%	38.7%
Richmond-San Rafael	37,083	12,698	34.2%	31.2%
San Francisco-Oakland Bay	135,114	29,891	22.1%	27.8%
San Mateo-Hayward	47,467	11,141	23.5%	31.5%
Total All Bridges	374,076	91,832	24.5%	29.4%

*Weekday toll direction only

In 2003, some 25 percent of the 1.5 million vehicles crossing the region's seven Caltrans toll bridges each day paid their toll electronically via a FasTrak™ transponder, with peak-hour usage approaching 30 percent. The MTC-run Bay Area Toll Authority hopes to boost usage to a level closer to that seen on the Golden Gate Bridge (run by a special district), where approximately 70 percent of the vehicles crossing during the morning peak period use FasTrak™. See the related story on Page 1.

511 Update

ITS America Award



PETER DEELER

Banners advertising the free 511 traveler information number have been popping up in dozens of locations around Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose.

The Intelligent Transportation Society (ITS) of America recognized MTC's 511 Traveler Information Service as the nation's "Best New Product, Service or Application" at its annual meeting and exposition, held in San Antonio in late April. "It was one of our most heavily entered categories this year — the competition from both the public and private sectors was stiff," said Craig Bannister, communications manager for the Washington, D.C.-based ITS America. Launched in December 2002, MTC's 511 system offers real-time traffic information as well as public transit, bicycle and ride-sharing information via phone at 511 and on the Web at <www.511.org>. The Bay Area is the largest metropolitan area in the country — and the first in California — to implement a 511 phone service.

Project Update

New Carquinez Bridge Path Offers Spectacular Vistas and Forms Critical Link in Regional Trails

Existing and Planned Carquinez Strait Trail Network

The new bicycle/pedestrian path across the Alfred Zampa Memorial Bridge connects Solano and Contra Costa counties along the Interstate 80 corridor, and forms a critical link in the San Francisco Bay Trail as well as the Bay Area Ridge Trail. As indicated on the map, the Ridge Trail and Bay Trail follow similar alignments along the north shore of the Carquinez Strait. The already impressive system of trails and paths in the vicinity of the Carquinez Strait is set to get even more extensive: Regional Measure 1 moneys (administered by MTC's Bay Area Toll Authority) are paying for the construction of a second, parallel trans-Strait path upstream as part of a project to expand the capacity of the Benicia-Martinez Bridge; when all the gaps are closed, outdoor enthusiasts will be able to bike or hike a 25-mile loop around the Carquinez Strait. **Note:** Until improvements are completed, only street parking is available at the Zampa Bridge path trailheads, located at Merchant Street/San Pablo Avenue on the southern side in Crockett, and at Maritime Academy Drive on the north end in Vallejo.

For more information, go to <www.baytrail.org> and <www.ridgetrail.org>.

The path along the Alfred Zampa Memorial Bridge (the new west-bound span of the Carquinez Bridge) began welcoming bicyclists and pedestrians in mid-May, closing a major gap in two regional trail systems while providing outdoor enthusiasts with a dramatic new recreational experience.

The 12-foot-wide multiuse path constitutes a long-anticipated link in the San Francisco Bay Trail, a work in progress that ultimately will encircle San Francisco and San Pablo bays along a 500-mile alignment, hugging the shoreline most of the way. It also doubles as a vital link in the Bay Area Ridge Trail, whose alignment encircles the region along the ridgelines — offering views of the bays.

The path is the crowning touch for the Zampa bridge, which crosses the Carquinez Strait along Interstate 80 and opened to traffic in November 2003. The bike/pedestrian lane is set off with green railings that provide a striking counterpoint to the ultramodern suspension span's red cables and gray, concrete towers.

Positioned on the west side of the new span, the path provides unobstructed views of San Pablo Bay and adjacent shorelines. Stretching from Maritime Academy Drive on the northern side to a soon-to-be landscaped trailhead



BILL HALL, CALTRANS

A steady stream of bicyclists and walkers tried out the new path across the Carquinez Strait on opening day.

at the southern end in Crockett, the new path measures 1.6 miles, and links to many more miles of existing trails along the Carquinez Strait and the San Pablo Bay shoreline as well as through Vallejo.

The \$500 million Carquinez Bridge project, including the bike path, was financed with Regional Measure 1 bridge tolls, which are administered by MTC's Bay Area Toll Authority. The project brings the number of Bay Area toll bridges with a bicycle/pedestrian path to four, the others being the Golden Gate Bridge, the Dumbarton Bridge and the Antioch Bridge*. The new path is open to wheelchair users, bicyclists and pedestrians daily from sunrise to sunset; no rollerblades, skateboards or dogs are allowed.

— Brenda Kahn

*For information on bicycle access across the other bridges, go to <www.bicycling.511.org>.

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